

COINS

Coin oddities: Are they gems or just plain junk?

By Roger Boye

This week's column answers questions about odd-looking coins owned by Tribune readers.

Q — While cleaning the garage, we found an extremely thin penny dated 1945. The lettering on both sides is clear, but the coin is less than half as thick as it should be. Is it for real? — T. N., Dixon

A — Most likely, a prankster created your thin penny by washing a normal cent with special acids; such treated coins have no value to collectors.

Q — On a few dimes in my collection, certain letters are missing in some of the words. For example, nearly half the letters in "e pluribus unum" do not show on one of the coins. Does this make them special? — G. W., Lake Geneva, Wis.

A — As coins are produced, parts of the die sometimes fill with grease and dirt, preventing some of the letters from "striking up." Coins with missing small letters are relatively common, and they command only a modest collector premium.

Q — I found a real gem while opening a roll of brand-new quarters at my bank. One of the coins has a copper-colored "heads side," and George Washington's portrait is barely visible. The tails side is normal. Quite naturally, I'm wondering if it has any value. — A. N., Chicago

A — Definitely, assuming it's an authentic minting error. As you may know, Uncle Sam makes quarters with two layers of a nickel alloy bonded to an inner copper core. Sometimes one of the nickel layers splits off during the minting process, exposing the copper center. Such coins retail for at least \$25, according to catalogs.